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Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention

Seventh periodic report of States parties due in 2016

Congo*

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Contents

	Page
Abbreviations and acronyms	5
Introduction	6
Part I: Responses to the concluding observations of the Committee following the submission of the sixth report	6
Recommendations in paragraphs 9 and 10	6
Parliament	7
Recommendations in paragraphs 12, 13 and 14	7
Visibility of the Convention	7
Definition of discrimination against women	7
Recommendations in paragraphs 16 and 18	8
Judicial complaint mechanisms	8
Recommendation in paragraph 20	9
National machinery for the advancement of women	9
Recommendation in paragraph 22	11
Stereotypes and harmful practices	11
Recommendation in paragraphs 22-25	12
Violence against women	12
Recommendation in paragraph 26	13
Violence against women in times of conflict	13
Recommendation in paragraph 28	13
Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution	13
Recommendation in paragraph 30	16
Participation in political and public life	16
Recommendation in paragraph 32	16
Education	16
Recommendation in paragraph 34	17
Employment	17
Recommendation in paragraph 36	18
Health	18
Recommendation in paragraph 38	19
Rural women	19
Recommendation in paragraph 40	20
Refugee women	20
Recommendation in paragraph 42	20
Indigenous women	20

Recommendation in paragraph 44 20
Marriage and family relations 20
National human rights institutions 21
Optional Protocol and amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention 21
Recommendation in paragraph 48 21
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 21
Recommendation in paragraph 49 21
Millennium Development Goals 21
Recommendation in paragraph 50 21
Outreach 21
Recommendation in paragraph 51 22
Ratification of other treaties 22
Recommendation in paragraph 53 22
Technical assistance 22
Part II: Review of progress according to the provisions of the Convention 22
Part I of the Convention 22
Article 2 22
Article 3 23
Article 4 24
Article 5 24
Article 6 25
Part II 26
Article 7 26
Article 8 27
Article 9 27
Part III 27
Article 10 27
Article 11 30
Article 12 31
Article 13 32
Article 14 32
Part IV 34
Article 15 34
Article 16 34
Part V 35
Article 18 35

Part VI 36
Article 24 36
Difficulties encountered in the implementation of the Convention 36
Looking forward 36

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACOLVF	Congolese Association to Combat Violence against Women
AFD	Agence française de développement (French Development Agency)
AFJC	Association of Women Lawyers of Congo
APC	Association for Progressive Communications
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
NAC	National AIDS Council
CNSEE	National Centre for Statistics and Economic Studies
DSCERP	Growth, Employment and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RBCSP	Results-Based Country Strategy Paper
ECOM	Congolese Household Survey
EDSC	Demographic and Health Survey of the Congo
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
ESSIC	Informal Sector and Unemployment Survey
INRAP	National Institute of Educational Research
MASAHS	Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity
MJDH	Ministry of Justice and Human Rights
MPF'FD	Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Integration of Women in Development
OCDH	Congolese Human Rights Observatory
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PND	National Development Plan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
RENAPAC	National Network of Indigenous Peoples of the Congo
EU	European Union
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
GBV	Gender-based violence

Introduction

1. The present report is prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which stipulates in article 18, paragraph 1, that "States parties undertake to submit to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for consideration by the Committee, a report on the legislative, judicial, administrative and other measures that they have adopted to give effect to the provisions of the present Convention and on the progress made in this regard".

2. To that end, the Congo has submitted two important reports covering the periods 1982-2002 (initial report combining the second, third, fourth and fifth periodic reports in January 2003) and 2003-2006 (sixth report in February 2012-CEDAW/C/COG/6) during the fifty-first session of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, held in Geneva, Switzerland.

3. At the last briefing, the Congo had provided updated information and statistics disaggregated by sex on the situation of women in the Congo, in all areas covered by the Convention in the period 2007-2012.

4. This seventh periodic report covers the period 2012-2015. It describes the situation of the Congo regarding the implementation of the Convention, presenting the progress made, problems encountered and opportunities available for the effective implementation of the Convention and all other international, regional and subregional legal instruments having the same objectives (item 9 of the Committee's concluding observations).

5. It has been prepared in accordance with the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties (item 56 of the Committee's concluding observations)

6. The data come from specialized public and private bodies (ministries, international agencies, academia and civil society organizations) whose actions complement each other (items 54 and 55 of the Committee's concluding observations).

Part I: Responses to the concluding observations of the Committee following the submission of the sixth report

7. This part contains responses to the concluding observations and recommendations made by the Committee on the sixth report on the implementation of the Convention.

Recommendations in paragraphs 9 and 10

8. The Republic of the Congo has given priority attention to all the provisions of the Convention and has a range of mechanisms to systematically and continuously implement them: (i) thematic studies (ECOM, DHS, GBV, ESSIC) (ii) policies and strategies (PRSP 2013-2017, DSPAR, PA-PNG, NDP 2012 -2016), (iii) consultative frameworks of technical and financial partners (CCPTF), thematic periodic reports (CEDAW, UPR), etc.

9. The concluding observations on the sixth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention have been widely disseminated, from March 2012 to December 2015, to Government and judicial and territorial bodies (MPFIFD, MEPSA, MASAH, MJDH, hospitals, police stations, prefectures and

municipalities), Parliament, international agencies (UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, UNESCO, EU) and civil society (RENALVISCO, AFJC, AZUR Development, RENAPAC ALTO, etc.) The results of the work are detailed in this report (see pp. 6-28).

Parliament

10. In the two chambers of Parliament there is a commission on "health, social affairs, family and gender". Between 2012 and 2015, they organized special workshops to raise awareness of gender issues in connection with various sectors of national life: (i) parliamentary day for advocacy on issues of gender and indigenous peoples, monitoring of development policies and programmes, with the Senate and the Network of Parliamentarians and development (RPRDP) (October 2012) (ii) "Gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting" (2013), parliamentary day on the rights of indigenous peoples (2014).

Recommendations in paragraphs 12, 13 and 14

Visibility of the Convention

11. Each year the ministries, specialized associations and legal clinics are organizing awareness-raising campaigns on the rights of women in connection with the Convention throughout the country, including in rural areas. The use of local languages (Lingala and Kituba) enables workers to reach easily all segments of local communities (Bantu and indigenous). Methods often used include informal discussions/debates and radio and television broadcasts (local networks) and community radio stations. These actions are more visible during electoral periods and international days (8 March, 31 July, 11 and 15 October and 10 December).

12. The dimensions of the Convention are reflected, formally and continuously, in the training of students in the "judiciary", "registrar" and "bar" branches of study at the National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM). For the development of a culture conducive to equality between men and women, the university offers other options through courses on "Gender and Development" (Master's degree in population and development) "Sociology of Gender", "History of Feminism" (History Department). Several students had already made presentations and written final dissertations on topics covering aspects of the Convention in the Republic of the Congo.

Definition of discrimination against women

13. The concept "discrimination" is taken into account in the national legal system. It is reflected in the notion of "non-discrimination" in several texts: (i) the Constitution of 6 November 2015 emphasizes the concept of "non-discrimination" (arts. 15, 31 and 39); (ii) Electoral Act No. 40-2014 of 1 September 2014 amending and supplementing certain provisions of Act No. 9 -2001 of 10 December 2001, Act No. 5-2007 of 25 May 2007 and Act No. 9-2012 of 23 May 2012 amending and supplementing certain provisions of the Electoral Act; (iii) Act No. 5-2011 of 25 February 2011 on the promotion and protection of indigenous peoples; (iv) Act No. 30-2011 of 3 June 2011 on efforts to control HIV/AIDS and protection of the rights of people living with HIV; (v) Act No. 4-2010 of 14 June 2010 on child protection in the Republic of the Congo (art. 6).

Recommendations in paragraphs 16 and 18

Judicial complaint mechanisms

14. The concerns highlighted in items (a) and (b) of this recommendation were addressed through the relaunch in 2015 of the work of the review commissions. This work, under the leadership of the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and State Reform, is being carried out with the financial support of the European Union, as part of the Project of Activities to Strengthen the Rule of Law and Associations (PAREDA). The texts reviewed are the following: Administrative Code, Civil Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, the Personal and Family Code, Legal Organization Code, Correctional Code, and Penal Code. Since the final texts are not yet available, a complete analysis of the content cannot be made.

15. A draft bill on gender violence that addresses sexual harassment and female genital mutilation is being developed.

16. There is as yet no law on human trafficking. The work initiated by the Government in 2006 on trafficking in women and children (MASAH, MPFIFD, MJDH), civil society (ALTO, OCDH, SAMU SOCIAL, RENAPAC), with the support of agencies of the United Nations system (UNICEF, UNFPA, IOM), has achieved: (i) several surveys and two studies, (ii) round tables of policymakers and donors, (iii) advocacy with specialized services of neighbouring countries and others (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Benin, Mali), (iv) the training of security officers (including the national node of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)), (v) adoption of partnership agreements between States (Congo-Benin) for better traceability of displacement of children.

17. A special bill on human trafficking was prepared in October 2012 with the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) through its Global Programme against Trafficking in Persons, funded by the United States Department of State.

18. To this must be added the adoption of Decree No. 2012-171 of 12 March 2012 on the ratification of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. This ratification was authorized by Act No. 5 2012, published in Official Gazette No. 12 of 22 March 2012 (pp. 295-300).

19. Between 2012 and 2015, several campaigns were carried out (MPFIFD and associations) to raise awareness among local and religious leaders and the general population throughout the country about the primacy of modern law condemning discriminatory customary practices and local traditions. Examples reported are: (i) abusive and excessive dowry costs, (ii) severe widowhood rites, (iii) lack of respect for the rights of widows and orphans, who are often subject to confiscation of property left by the deceased parent, (iv) early marriages and pregnancies, (v) gender violence perpetrated in the name of tradition. Forums and radio and television broadcasts dramatizing scenes of daily life and the use of national languages are used to reach all segments of society.

20. The Ministry of Justice has launched a comprehensive programme to strengthen its logistical and human resources: construction and rehabilitation of courts of major jurisdiction in all departments to improve access to justice, mass recruitment of young judges, revision of the statutes of judges, together with wage increases.

21. Outreach activities conducted by ministries and international specialized agencies in partnership with civil society, concerning the rights of women, their

empowerment and violence against them, are helping to raise awareness among them. Several national indicators reveal that many women know that there are laws protecting them against violence and that they are encouraged to report such violence to the competent authorities. Despite the paucity of reporting on national trends, experienced observers have noted that public security and justice services, as well as private organizations (legal clinics, specialized associations) are increasingly sought by women, and the number of applicants has also increased throughout the country.

22. Among the multiple barriers that limit the efforts of support organizations and the ambitions of women capable of defending their rights are the following: (i) the reluctance of women to denounce their aggressors or to lodge a complaint (shame, fear of reprisals and dishonour to the family), (ii) the high costs of enforcement or judicial fees and (iii) the slow pace of administrative procedures and the irregularity of criminal court hearings.

23. There is no law giving women access to free legal aid. Act No. 001/84 of 20 January 1984 on the reorganization of legal aid has not been updated or replaced by another law.

24. Legal literacy programmes on the implementation of legislation to prohibit discrimination have been implemented under the action plan of the National Gender Policy, the plan of action to improve the living conditions of indigenous peoples, and the fight against human trafficking. This has allowed for the training of judges, magistrates, police officers and officers of the Congolese armed forces (FAC) and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The aim was to provide the necessary tools to combat discriminatory practices, gender-based violence and trafficking in persons.

25. On all these occasions, special emphasis is placed on the concepts of protection of rights, dignity, justice and the rule of law, which applies to everyone without exception.

26. The first step in this direction is the elimination of traditional courts.

27. Secondly, associations supported by ministries and international specialized agencies are carrying out extensive outreach to show people the importance of using the judicial system and not the traditional justice mechanisms in cases of violations of women's rights.

28. The messaging emphasizes that modern justice, which applies to all citizens without exception, is based on universal principles of human rights and gender equality.

29. Lastly, 600 justice actors (police, commissioners, judges) and facilitators of specialized associations have been trained in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire. Police stations in Brazzaville were equipped with computer equipment (computers) and materials for reporting (video recorders, cameras) and for registration of cases (registers).

Recommendation in paragraph 20

National machinery for the advancement of women

30. During events involving women (Independence Day and international days), empowerment and poverty alleviation for women are often used as topics for discussion. Policymakers and the public are influenced by meetings targeting them or through their participation in activities organized for women.

31. A project entitled "Women and income-generating activities" was implemented by MPFIFD, with the support of bilateral and multilateral partners. Ministry teams toured all the national territory to identify beneficiaries, encourage them to organize into groups, train them in management of production units and distribute agricultural materials and working kits (hairdressing, tailoring, etc.)

32. The national machinery for the empowerment of women is the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Integration of Women in Development (MPFIFD); it is also establishing the institutional network covering a large part of the country, thanks to multiple partnerships with all other sectoral departments (mainstreaming missions) and many specialized international organizations.

33. Like other ministries, the MPFIFD has an annual budget corresponding to the chapters on the priorities identified in conjunction with the National Gender Policy and its action plan.

34. This mechanism is provided with the necessary human and technical resources to: (i) ensure the proper functioning of the structure, (ii) promote the rights and empowerment of women; and (iii) strengthen cooperation with civil society. The human resources of MPFIFD are mainly composed of civil servants (about 380) of both sexes (18 to 60 years of age), who lead the following bodies: The Office of the Minister, 3 directorates attached to the Office, 3 general directorates, 12 central directorates and 24 departmental directorates (2 per department).

35. These bodies are engaged in continuous actions for: (i) the mainstreaming of gender in policies, programmes and activities promoted by all governmental and private bodies operating in the country, and (ii) the empowerment of women (development of income-generating activities and capacity-building, funding and equipment).

36. MPFIFD has a policy of strengthening staff capacity. Each year, officers from the different levels of the Ministry receive thematic training at the national and international levels.

37. This work is done by MPFIFD, with the contribution of gender focal points appointed in the ministries and with technical and financial support from development partners.

38. Since the Congo has been engaged since 2013 in the process of results-based management (RBM), several national managers have received relevant training.

39. In this context, the Directors of Studies and Planning (DEP) of 38 ministries were trained in gender-sensitive budgeting in July 2013. A plan to follow up on the recommendations of the workshop was adopted by participants, by which each of them is obliged to ensure effective integration of efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the formulation of sectoral budgets.

40. The specific strategy is defined in the action plan of the National Gender Policy (under revision), in the National Development Plan (PND) 2012-2016 and in different sectoral plans (health, education, agriculture, etc.).

41. Significant efforts are being made to produce gender indicators and statistical data concerning the situation of women, through: (i) the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming in the framework papers (PRSP, DHS, ECOM), (ii) the production of disaggregated data in a number of areas, (iii) the promotion of monitoring mechanisms on gender (Women's Advisory Council, Constitution of 6 November 2015, arts. 232 and 233) and (iv) the establishment of the National Gender Observatory (2008); (iv) the conduct of thematic studies with gender indicators.

42. However, further efforts need to be made to address the shortage of sex-disaggregated data in several areas of national life. Hence the need for a genuine partnership between the gender mechanism and the other government structures in charge of data collection and preparation of reference reports (DHS, ECOM, etc.).

Recommendation in paragraph 22

Stereotypes and harmful practices

43. Until 2015, in the absence of a specific comprehensive strategy, the action plan of the National Gender Policy and the sectoral plans (health, education, agriculture, etc.) were used as reference texts in a results-based approach to eliminating traditional practices and stereotypes that are harmful to and discriminate against women, in accordance with article 2 (f) and article 5 (a) of the Convention, and in different sectors (health, education, agriculture, etc.)

44. The specific strategy will be developed in 2016, as a result of the studies carried out in 2015, with financial and technical support from UNFPA and UNDP on: (i) "Study on elements for the elaboration of the national strategy to combat gender-based violence", (ii) "Analysis of gender-related actions and strategic perspectives in the Republic of the Congo", (iii) "Analysis of the legal/institutional framework and judicial practices in the area of gender-based violence in the Congo with a view to preparing a draft bill on the criminalization of violence against women" and (iv) "Diagnostic study on medical care and counselling for victims of GBV".

45. In the meantime, to undertake that fight, stakeholders on the ground use the following tools: (i) awareness-raising campaigns; (ii) elimination of stereotypes in textbooks by 50 INRAP managers trained as a result of the textbook analysis conducted in 2010; (iii) outreach tools and techniques of gender mainstreaming in the preparation of textbooks for teachers by these 50 INRAP managers.

46. Awareness-raising activities to combat harmful traditional practices are carried out in all departments. Emphasis is placed on practices such as: (i) those related to sexuality (sexual violence, early initiation of sexual behaviour); (ii) polygamy; (iii) abusive rites (constraints on widowhood, non-recognition of the inheritance rights of widows and orphans; economic exploitation of dowries, domestic violence; female genital mutilation — despite the lack of comprehensive reports on this issue). Several ministries and civil society organizations are involved in this struggle (AFJC, AZUR Development, CONADEF, OCDH, etc.), with the support of development partners (United Nations agencies, EU, AFD, etc.)

47. Furthermore, all traditional practices harmful to women are part of the laws containing discriminatory provisions that have been in the process of being revised since 2015.

48. In order to monitor progress, assessments are made each year by the Committee on Monitoring and Evaluating Public Policies and Programmes (CSEPPP) established by Decree No. 2011-107 of 12 February 2011. The mission of this Committee is to monitor and evaluate programmes and projects in the priority action programmes (PAP) and medium-term expenditure frameworks (MTEFs) of the public bodies concerned, in the local development plans (LDPs) and in the cooperation frameworks signed with development partners.

49. A methodological guide prepared for this mission allows for monitoring of the process and of the results (outputs, effects); this requires the monitoring of the physical activities and human resources involved, as well as the monitoring of financial resources and administrative follow-up.

Recommendation in paragraphs 22-25

Violence against women

50. Following the submission to the Government's General Secretariat of a bill, with a view to its adoption, on gender violence, sexual harassment and female genital mutilation, MPFIFD continues its efforts to accelerate the adoption process.

51. Specialized associations are also following up with the Ministry (see p. 7 of the present report).

52. The specific strategy will be developed in 2016, following studies in 2015 (see details under item (a) of the recommendation contained in paragraph 22).

53. These awareness-raising activities are increasing in the country through the activities of associations and donors that support them. These actions target men and women of all ages and from all segments of society. They are using the media, conferences and discussions (in meeting rooms or in community locations, including churches).

54. A broad awareness-raising campaign for women is being conducted by all national and international stakeholders to change attitudes and behaviours, with a view to combating the stigmatization of victims of violence and encouraging them not to hide their suffering.

55. Six hundred (600) law enforcement officials (gendarmes, military and police) were trained on violence and gender inequalities in Pointe-Noire in 2015. In Brazzaville, 80 facilitators of care units for victims, as well as 35 police, social, health and justice personnel, have been trained on the referral of victims of violence.

56. Several police officers, judges and health and social workers have been trained on the criminal nature of violence against women. They have also been trained in techniques of reception, counselling of victims and identification, documentation and referral of cases uncovered.

57. Following this training, their facilities (police stations and hospital units) have been provided with information technology, office supplies, photographic equipment, digital cameras and urgently needed medicines.

58. Efforts are being made, through awareness-raising among the population in general and women in particular, to facilitate their access to justice, and especially to encourage them to file complaints against perpetrators, including for domestic violence and sexual harassment.

59. The mechanisms of comprehensive care for victims of violence are being put in place gradually, but they remain limited in Brazzaville. The reasons for the weak development of this mechanism are: (i) the persistence of traditional considerations surrounding violence against women, (ii) the lack of systematization of partnerships between specialized services (social affairs, education centres, health services, police and justice); (iii) the infrequent use of psychologists, (iv) capacity constraints that limit the ambitions of some specialists or social actors.

60. The collection of disaggregated data on the number of complaints, prosecutions and convictions and on the sentences imposed on perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence is still difficult and unsystematic in the Congo. This is primarily due to the absence of mechanisms to compile activities and disseminate the results. Since 2008, the network of non-governmental organizations working in the area of gender-based violence (RENALVISCO) and the observatory on gender violence have lacked the means to produce reports on data that reflect national realities.

Recommendation in paragraph 26

Violence against women in times of conflict

61. Historically, the Congo has had mechanisms to provide medical and psychological support to women victims of sexual violence in times of peace and in times of conflict. Those who are trained to carry out interventions in times of conflict are still rare and poorly connected by networks, and they have no specialized centres for advising women who have been victims of traumatic events.

Recommendation in paragraph 28

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

62. The first major study to investigate the scope, extent and causes of human trafficking was conducted in 2013 with the support of United Nations agencies (UNFPA/UNICEF/IOM/).[1]

63. The published results showed that:

(a) The context of migration enhances the risk of human trafficking;

(b) The silence surrounding trafficking often makes it particularly difficult to gain knowledge about the phenomenon, as well as to stem its growth and care for its victims;

(c) The overall development of the situation has been affected, inter alia, by the weakening of community and family safety nets for the protection of children, women and the elderly, family poverty, rural-urban migration, the breakdown of traditional family organizations, and the ease of communications and mobility across borders. The same is true with regard to changing attitudes and Personal and family behaviours that tend to undermine community norms and perceptions;

(d) This phenomenon is visible in the interior of the country (urban settlements located along the rail network or the Congo river, mining and timber regions, etc.), in border areas (with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon and Gabon, for example);

(e) A total of 168 persons have been identified as victims of human trafficking, including 70 adults (36 men and 34 women or, respectively, 51.43 and 48.57 per cent of the adult victims), and 98 minors (38 boys and 60 girls or, respectively, 38.78 and 61.22 per cent of the identified victims). In other words, in this group of victims, women represent 56 per cent, compared with 44 per cent of men. Their number is smaller than that of men in the group of adults, unlike the proportions in the group of minors;

(f) The child victims of trafficking were recruited by men (56 per cent) and women (44 per cent). The recruiter is generally a friend of the family (41 per cent, or 40 children out of 98), a relative (32 per cent, or 31 children out of 98), a stranger (16 per cent, or 15 children out of 98) or one of the parents (11 per cent, or 11 children out of 98). Seventy-four per cent of children left with the consent of their parents;

(g) The majority of the child victims who were able to respond to the question on the nationality of the recruiter said that they had been recruited by Beninese (38 out of 98). For the rest, it was found that recruiters were of Congolese nationality (20 out of 98) and from neighbouring countries, such as the Democratic

[1] Caroline Zwaenepoel and Rodrigue Abalo, 2013, Etude sur le phénomène de la traite des personnes en République du Congo (Study on the phenomenon of trafficking in persons in the Republic of the Congo), MASSAH/UNFPA/UNICEF/IOM.

Republic of the Congo (19 out of 98), Cameroon (4 out of 98), the Central African Republic (4 out of 98), Mali (3 out of 98), Gabon (2 out of 98) and Nigeria (2 out of 98);

(h) A minority of the victims identified (23), mainly in Pointe-Noire, were assisted by the NGO, ALTO. The victims identified in other localities were referred to an authority, such as a police station, but unfortunately did not receive specific assistance;

(i) Information is still unavailable on the determinants of routes used, choices of final destinations and concealment and survival strategies in the areas of trafficking. These topics have not yet been the subject of in-depth analysis.

64. No study to investigate the scope, extent and causes of forced prostitution, particularly of women and girls, has been carried out in the Congo since 2012.

65. Congolese legislation on trafficking in persons includes the following national, regional and international laws: (i) Act No. 18 of 31 May 2006 authorizing accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; (ii) Palermo Protocol (ratified in March 2012); (iii) Act of 12 March 2012 authorizing the ratification of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; (iv) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2012); (v) the bill on trafficking in persons (validated at the workshop of 30 July 2013 in Brazzaville).

66. Actions aimed at developing regional cooperation mechanisms on issues of trafficking in persons are being carried out by the Government and civil society (MASAH, UNICEF, UNFPA, IOM, ALTO, SAMU Social) that have enabled the Congo to: (i) participate in the establishment of a pool of resource persons who are experts in the use of tools for sharing information and experiences on police and judicial cooperation in the context of trafficking in persons, (ii) train professionals (judges, police officers and representatives of civil society (Brazzaville, 2013)) on the modalities of cooperation with national and international investigators and on the challenges related to investigations and ways to overcome them.

67. The Congo has acceded to the Multilateral Cooperation Agreement to Combat Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, in West and Central Africa, adopted in Abuja on 6 July 2006, between the Governments of the members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

68. This document is a multilateral cooperation agreement to combat trafficking in children and women by seeking to harmonize the States' national legislation. It underpins the following strategies: (i) prevention and awareness-raising, (ii) victim protection and punishment of traffickers, (iii) collection, exchange and analysis of information and (iv) training.

69. Until 2013, the national monitoring committee for the Agreement has not yet been set up in the Congo. Meetings on trafficking issues remain informal between State and non-State actors. Ultimately, many steps remain to be taken with regard to the implementation of the Agreement and its Action Plan.[2]

70. The Congo also has a bilateral cooperation agreement with the Republic of Benin on the fight against trafficking in children. The agreement, signed on

[2] C Zwaenepoel et al., op. cit., p. 39.

20 September 2011 in Pointe-Noire, is the first in the country concerning this matter. It is accompanied by a joint action plan to combat trafficking, signed in Cotonou on 16 February 2012. The agreement covers the following strategic areas: (i) identification, prevention and communication, (ii) care, rehabilitation, reintegration and reinsertion, (iii) cross-border investigations and prosecution, and (iv) cooperation, monitoring and evaluation.

71. Priority actions envisaged included the establishment of a joint committee, strengthening mechanisms for the identification of perpetrators and accomplices of trafficking, the designation of focal points and the establishment of a network of State and non-State actors.

72. However, the two States face some difficulties in the implementation of these documents.

73. Prostitution is not legalized in the Republic of the Congo; it is practised informally. However, in the absence of a strategy for a comprehensive approach to combating prostitution, or to implementing support programmes for women and girls who wish to leave prostitution, awareness-raising and outreach activities are being undertaken by the Ministry and NGOs, associations and religious denominations. Some associations organized by female sex workers or prostitutes (ACO in Pointe-Noire, UAFPA in Brazzaville) are making efforts to regulate prostitutes by providing them with specialized health and safety services;[3] they are also helping those who want to leave prostitution by providing ways to develop income-generating activities.

74. Many efforts are being made by the security services and specialized associations (ATTAC 3) to address the root causes of prostitution and sexual exploitation and trafficking and to rehabilitate and reintegrate victims.

75. But these efforts do not always succeed, owing to a combination of factors limiting both the outreach to persons affected by such phenomena and their involvement in the struggle, and the mobilization of the resources needed to pay the costs relating thereto.

76. Finally, the complexity related to the taboos surrounding the issues of prostitution and sexual exploitation do not allow those who want to combat them to operate freely and to have substantial support. They have been increasingly unable to raise girls out of the poverty that motivates their choices.

77. Expanded programmes aimed at addressing the root causes of prostitution of women and girls, especially poverty, are included in policies aimed at reducing gender inequalities limiting women's access to opportunities in the country in key areas such as education, health, decent employment and credit.

78. The Congo has already ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime on 13 May 2002 and has passed the Act of 12 March 2012 authorizing the ratification of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (New York, 15 November 2000).

79. The Congo has also passed (i) Decree No. 2014-473 ratifying the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa; and (ii) the Act authorizing the ratification of an agreement between the

[3] ACO: Association Coeur d'Océan. UAFPA: Union pour l'Assistance des Femmes Prostituées d'Afrique.

Government of the Republic of the Congo and the Government of the French Republic on the concerted management of migration flows and co-development.

Recommendation in paragraph 30

Participation in political and public life

80. The draft law on parity is still pending adoption.

81. The quota reserved for women candidates in legislative and local elections rose from 15 per cent to 30 per cent with the Electoral Act of 2014 (para. 3, new arts. 61 and 67).[4]

82. This was not applied to the legislative elections of June 2012 but was in force for the 2014 local elections.

83. Despite the existence of a legal framework that guarantees the access of women to all areas of public life, in particular to the Government, departmental and communal councils, the judiciary and the diplomatic service, including at high levels of decision-making, their level of participation is still low everywhere.

84. However, since 2012, many improvements have been made in the appointments of women to various decision-making positions: (i) 3 women sub-prefects out of 86 sub-prefectures in the country, or 2.33 per cent; (ii) 17 women professional mayors of urban municipalities out of a total of 52, or 30 per cent (PD No. 2011/262 of 31 March 2011) (compared to one female mayor in 1999-2012); (iii) 4 women ambassadors. By contrast, the number of women ministers has decreased from 4 (2012) to 3 (2015).

85. Awareness campaigns are being held throughout the country on female leadership in order to bring about changes in attitudes and behaviours among both women and men to improve ownership of the issues relating to the participation of women in public and political life.

86. The effectiveness of measures taken and results achieved to ensure women's greater participation in political and public life are being monitored through the various evaluation reports produced by the country within the framework of the commitments undertaken at the international and subregional levels.

Recommendation in paragraph 32

Education

87. Awareness-raising activities are undertaken by the authorities and associations with communities, families, students, teachers and officials, including men, about the importance of women's and girls' education

88. Opportunities for and equal access to education, as well as technical and vocational training, have always been guaranteed by the State. This is reflected in various laws such as: (i) the Constitution of 6 November 2015 (art. 29), (ii) school laws, (iii) specific legislation (Act No. 4/2010 of 14 June 2010 on child protection in the Republic of the Congo 2010; Act No. 5-2011 of 25 February 2011 on the promotion and protection of indigenous peoples; and Act No. 9-92 of 22 April 1992 on the status, protection and advancement of persons with disabilities (current).

[4] Act No. 40-2014 of 1 September 2014 amending and supplementing certain provisions of Act No. 9-2001 of 10 December 2001 and Acts Nos. 5-2007 of 25 May 2007 and 9-2012 of 23 May 2012 amending and supplementing certain provisions of the Electoral Act, paragraph 3.

89. Efforts to encourage girls to stay in school longer and to choose all fields of education (including scientific) are being made by associations such as FAWE, JED, FRM, which offer prizes to the best pupils each year.

90. The law guarantees pregnant girls the ability to continue their studies and resume them after childbirth.

91. Several associations complement the action of public technical schools through training in various areas to facilitate the occupational integration of girls who have dropped out of school, including teenage girls and teenage mothers. Among the most highly promoted areas are the so-called "female" occupations (hairdressing, baking, sewing, soap making, catering, market gardening), but also "male" occupations, regarded as providing more employment opportunities (welding, mechanics, automotive electrics, masonry, electricity, refrigeration, data processing, etc.)

92. Encouraging results are being recorded annually through the successful partnership between the associations responsible for the implementation of projects, MPFIFD and donors. This enables continuous monitoring of training. At the end of training, girls are sometimes provided with kits and small amounts of funding to set up private workshops or cooperatives.

93. In principle, there is no law in the Congo that discriminates against children with disabilities in education. Several of them have been educated in mainstream schools and others in special schools for the blind and deaf.

94. In general, the national education system has not yet developed specialized structures for all types of disabilities.

95. A new revision of school textbooks to eliminate remaining stereotypes has not been made since the review in 2010 of textbooks in reading and mathematics for primary schools, colleges and lycées (new revision 2014/2015).

96. The female literacy rate has improved, thanks to the national policy for the establishment of literacy centres throughout the country, including in rural areas. Everywhere, these centres are very well attended by men and women.

97. There is a Directorate-General for Literacy within the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education in charge of literacy.

Recommendation in paragraph 34

Employment

98. There is no legislation that discriminates against women with regard to access to employment and during the course of employment. In practice, however, they are less likely than men to obtain certain jobs, especially because of illiteracy, lack of qualifications, psychological constraints and lack of knowledge about ways to seek employment and recruitment procedures.

99. To minimize these trends, the Government and civil society organized several awareness-raising campaigns in schools and within the family to encourage girls to discover innovative fields and providers of jobs. Special emphasis is placed on science.

100. In order to extend the benefits of the National Social Security Fund to informal sector workers, advocacy and mobilization campaigns have been held in recent years. Taxi drivers, domestic workers and artisanal designers are being targeted in this process.

101. Only the women's savings and credit funds have a specific policy for women. Other microfinance structures (CAPPED, FAM, etc.) are also available thanks to the facilitation of membership and the granting of financing with low interest rates.

Recommendation in paragraph 36

Health

102. Every year, health is one of the sectors with a large budget, with major support from development partners involved in the Congo.

103. Over the past 10 years the Government has made significant efforts to strengthen the health system in terms of the number of health centres and qualified personnel, even if much remains to be done, especially in rural areas.

104. Among the actions taken in the Congo to reduce the incidence of maternal mortality and eliminate its causes are: (i) the promotion of family planning; (ii) the training of health workers and the public (including women) on life-saving skills; (iii) mobilization and revitalization of associations and networks of midwives and doctors; (iv) launch of PMTCT programmes; (v) the institutionalization of free caesarean section and malaria treatment for pregnant women and children under age 5 (Decree No. 2008-128 of 23 June 2008); (vi) the institutionalization of the campaign on the Reduction of Maternal Mortality (CARMMA, 2009); (vii) road map for the reduction of maternal mortality; (viii) Government mothers/children weeks; (ix) the continuation of the National Programme for the elimination of obstetric fistula (launched in 2006, with technical and financial support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); (x) regular awareness-raising among the population in general and of vulnerable groups (adolescents, young people, indigenous persons) on the importance of health services for the prevention and treatment of diseases and complications related to reproductive health, etc.

105. Efforts are being made by the Government and civil society, with the support of development partners, to reduce the barriers that women face in accessing health care, including those related to sociocultural norms that persist even today.

106. There are no specific laws for the provision of qualified medical assistance reserved for women and girls suffering from health complications due to unsafe abortions and ad hoc sanitary facilities. They have access to services for gynaecological care and monitoring during pregnancy and childbirth.

107. Many large-scale awareness-raising campaigns for the general population have been conducted in recent years.

108. In 2015, a national programme to combat teenage pregnancy was developed with the involvement of several ministries (MPFIFD, MEPSA), schools and religious denominations. It included: (i) a study on the analysis of curricula incorporating lessons on sex education, ii) the organization of a national forum on the sexuality of adolescents and youth, (iii) the organization of awareness-raising activities within churches and schools on the prevention of early pregnancies and (iv) the broadcast of radio and television programmes developed by young people on teenage pregnancy and the importance of contraception, family planning and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

109. But much remains to be done to better integrate effective lessons on sexual and reproductive health and rights into school curricula at all levels of education.

110. In all departments, there are health centres and community health structures that make available contraceptive products and services for sexual and reproductive health. But totally free services and products are not always available, and there is no guarantee of national coverage.

111. For the effective implementation of the national strategic framework to combat HIV/AIDS and STIs (2009-2013), the Government and associations are carrying out actions such as: (i) awareness-raising activities on the prevention and care of persons living with HIV (PLHIV), (ii) awareness-raising about the rights of PLHIV and the fight against stigmatization and discrimination, (iii) organization of the supply and distribution of condoms, (iv) continuation of the policy on free antiretroviral treatment and (v) revitalization of AIDS control units in public structures (ULS and UDLS) as well as networks and platforms of associations working in the field.

Recommendation in paragraph 38

Rural women

112. Measures necessary to significantly reduce poverty, especially in rural areas, are being taken annually in the Congo. They are initiated by the Government, international organizations and national associations. Among the actions undertaken by the authorities to reduce the poverty of women, especially in rural areas, including those for women investing in agriculture, are the following: (i) the launch of programmes of agricultural mechanization and training on farming techniques, (ii) the launch of PRODER and installation of its branches in all regions that provide technical support and inputs to farmers; (iii) the opening of women's savings and credit funds (since 1990) in most regions.

113. There are no specific measures for women that would help to meet all these needs. The latter benefit from infrastructure installed in their localities, especially through the policy of accelerated municipal development of all departments, in the areas of health, education, access to safe drinking water and sanitation services and income-generating projects.

114. In the traditional context, women have access to land to cultivate as members of the owner clans.

115. With the modernization of the country, these differences that discriminate against women will get worse. This is the case, for example, with the changes brought about by the accelerated municipal development of departments and the requirements of the land reform.[5] The municipal development policy is based on the construction of multiple infrastructures that reconfigure living and working spaces affecting the habits of rural women.

116. Since the destruction of some of the areas used by women for growing crops, together with the paths to these areas, many women have been abruptly forced to change their activities or remain idle. Furthermore, under the provisions of the new land law, women who have become accustomed to installing their activities on land often obtained by mutual agreement or on the basis of old, intergenerationally transmitted practices will soon be unable to continue these activities. Not knowing how to assert their rights to those lands by formal recognition, many will be left without work sites. This is the case already for those working in open spaces (even on the road sides) in the cities, who have been expelled for the installation of public infrastructure (roads, administrative buildings, stadiums).

117. A growing number of mass awareness-raising campaigns are being organized on this issue for the population in general, and women in particular.

[5] Presidential Decree No. 2014-242 of 28 May 2014 amends and complements certain provisions of Decree No. 2011-548 of 17 August 2011 establishing procedures for land management.

Recommendation in paragraph 40

Refugee women

118. There is a national legislative framework that improves the efficiency and accuracy of the process of determining refugee status (Act of 6 October 2014 authorizing the ratification of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa).

119. Whenever there are humanitarian situations, United Nations agencies participate with public authorities and associations to establish mechanisms for the recognition of refugee status for those in need and to protect them against all forms of gender-specific persecution.

120. The Congo has a policy to protect refugee women from all forms of violence and to set up mechanisms for the care of victims and the prosecution of perpetrators of such violence (see Act 23-96 of 6 June 1996, still in force).

121. Actions in this direction are being carried out in partnership with specialized ministries, development partners and civil society.

122. The Congo has acceded to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.

Recommendation in paragraph 42

Indigenous women

123. Replies to the issues set out in (a), (b) and (c) form part of the national agenda. The efforts of the Congolese State on these issues have been crowned by the enactment of Act No. 5-2011 of 25 February 2011 on the promotion and protection of indigenous peoples. It provides that "any form of discrimination against indigenous peoples, based on their social origin or their indigenous identity, is prohibited in accordance with the laws in force" (art. 2); "acts of torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment against indigenous peoples will be punished in accordance with the provisions of article 309 of the Penal Code, on killing and bodily injury, with the exception of the death penalty" (art. 7); and "the trafficking and sexual exploitation of indigenous children and women will be punished in accordance with the provisions of articles 334 and 335 bis of the Penal Code" (art. 9).

124. The Congolese Government established the International Forum on Indigenous Peoples (FIPAC), held every two years in Impfondo (department of Likouala). In the light of its success in the subregion, the headquarters of the Forum was transferred to ECCAS and COMIFAC.

125. The promotion of the ORA (Observe, React and Act) schools, with the technical and financial support of UNICEF, helped to improve the attitudes of indigenous peoples vis-à-vis enrolment, as well as the number of enrolled at different levels and regularity of attendance.

Recommendation in paragraph 44

Marriage and family relations

126. Points (a) and (b) are considered in the context of the legal reform commissions that work under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, with support from PAREDA since 2015. These draft revised texts are being validated (Administrative Code, Civil Code, Code of Civil Procedure, Personal and Family Code, Judiciary Code, Correctional Code and Penal Code).

127. Specialized public institutions (ministries), supported by development partners (United Nations agencies, EU, embassies of various countries) and national associations (Azur Development, ATTAC 3, ASI International, Mibeko, AFJC, etc.) and international agencies (MSF, International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Médecins d' Afrique, IRC, etc.) are organizing many awareness campaigns for community leaders (village heads, leaders of traditional organizations, religious leaders) on the need to combat certain practices detrimental to women.

128. The revitalization of the work of the legal reform commission with the involvement of several sectors (jurists, social sciences) is the result of multiple advocacy efforts with policymakers and donors.

National human rights institutions

129. Under current law, the National Human Rights Commission is one of the key institutions of the country, together with the Economic and Social Council, for example. It has a status in accordance with the Paris Principles, as well as adequate resources. Its role is to support all organizations for the effective implementation of laws relating to human rights in general and gender equality in particular.

130. Indeed, the National Human Rights Commission is gender sensitive in terms of the composition of its teams and the focus of its activities.

Optional Protocol and amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention

131. The Congo ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2008.

132. The Congo accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention concerning the frequency of meetings of the Committee.

Recommendation in paragraph 48

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

133. The Congo fully benefits from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, has produced the various periodic reports and has actively participated in the historic events marking its strong support for the principles upheld.

Recommendation in paragraph 49

Millennium Development Goals

134. Over the past 10 years, the Congo has demanded that all sectors mainstream a gender perspective in all major actions undertaken in the country, from the design of development policies and programmes to their implementation, and in the drafting of monitoring and evaluation reports.

Recommendation in paragraph 50

Outreach

135. The Ministry for the Advancement and Integration of Women has supported many meetings and radio broadcasts to disseminate these recommendations on measures to be taken to ensure the de jure and de facto equality of women and the further steps that are required in that regard. Government officials, politicians, parliamentarians, women's organizations and human rights defenders participated in these meetings. Radio broadcasts were often made in national languages for wide

dissemination. In addition, leaflets, posters and DVDs have been produced and disseminated by national artists on various issues accessible to the wider public.

Recommendation in paragraph 51

Ratification of other treaties

136. The Congo has ratified the following instruments: (i) the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (see cumulative report – DGDH, 2007); and (ii) the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (New York, 13 December 2006) (ratified by the Congo on 2 September 2014 and entered into force on 2 October 2014).

Recommendation in paragraph 53

Technical assistance

137. In the Congo, there has been excellent cooperation between national institutions and international organizations, including those of the United Nations system, such as UN-Women, UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNFPA, WHO and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. All these agencies are providing considerable technical assistance for the development and implementation of jointly conceived programmes.

138. The Congolese Government has benefited from the support of agencies of the United Nations system for the preparation of the present report. Several national frameworks have received training organized at the national level by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the process of submission of periodic reports to the treaty bodies.

Part II: Review of progress according to the provisions of the Convention

Part I of the Convention

Article 2

States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake:

(a) To embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation if not yet incorporated therein and to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the effective realization of this principle;

139. The Constitution of 6 November 2015 recognizes the equality of men and women by incorporating a specific provision on gender parity (arts. 15 and 17).

140. In connection with these new provisions, the draft law on gender parity was revised and sent to the Supreme Court for its opinion. Implementing legislation was also being developed.

(b) To adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women;

141. Several laws contain provisions prohibiting discrimination against women, including sanctions against the perpetrators of such discrimination. These include Act No. 5-2011 of 25 February 2011 on the promotion and protection of indigenous

peoples; It provides that "the trafficking and sexual exploitation of indigenous children and women will be punished in accordance with the provisions of articles 334 and 335 bis of the Penal Code" (art. 9) and Act No. 4 -2010 of 4 June 2010 on child protection in the Republic of the Congo. These safeguards remain in place.

142. These draft revised texts are being validated: Administrative Code, Civil Code, Code of Civil Procedure, Personal and Family Code, Judiciary Code, Correctional Code and Penal Code.

(c) To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination;

143. The Ministry of Justice has launched a comprehensive programme to strengthen its logistical and human resources: construction and rehabilitation of courts of major jurisdiction in all departments to improve access to justice, mass recruitment of young judges, revision of the statutes of judges, together with wage increases.

144. National courts and other public institutions apply a series of legal and regulatory instruments that ensure the legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and their effective protection against any act of discrimination.

(d) To refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation;

(e) To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise;

(f) To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;

(g) To repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women.

145. In response to items (d), (e), (f) and (g), the Government has revived, with the support of the European Union, through the Project of Actions to Strengthen the Rule of Law and Associations (PAREDA - second phase), the review and drafting of eight (8) ordinary codes in force in the Congo, including (i) the Civil Code and Code of Criminal Procedure; (ii) the Personal and Family Code; (iii) the Criminal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure; (iv) the Correctional Code; (v) the Administrative and Financial Code; (vi) the Judiciary Code.

Article 3

States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

146. The Congo has a legal framework and appropriate implementation mechanisms to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres. Examples are:

(a) The National Gender Policy, its implementation action plan (2009-2013) and the National Development Plan (NDP 2012-2016) are reference documents on the principles mentioned above;

(b) The institutionalization of the Women's Advisory Council under the new Constitution (art. 232);

(c) In the political field, the Electoral Act of 2002, as amended and supplemented in 2014, establishes a quota system of at least 30 per cent for women in order to narrow the gaps that discriminate against women compared to men in the parliamentary and local elections.

Article 4

1. Adoption by States parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.

147. The special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women are considered as non-discriminatory acts.

148. The Electoral Act has increased the participation of women in local elections from 15 to 30 per cent.

2. Adoption by States Parties of special measures, including those measures contained in the present Convention, aimed at protecting maternity shall not be considered discriminatory.

149. Free caesarean sections and other obstetrical procedures, distribution of insecticide-treated mosquito nets to pregnant women and free anti-malarial drugs, as well as the implementation of the national programme to combat obstetric fistula, are special measures aimed at protecting maternity.

Article 5

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures:

(a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;

150. In order to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary practices, the various laws adopted by the country are complemented by many discussions at all levels to expose the practices carried out in the name of tradition that trap women in secondary statuses and roles, subjecting them to discrimination and violence and assault of all kinds. Outreach and awareness broadcasts (with informative pictures and sketches) are freely disseminated to the public through an increasingly engaged civil society.

(b) To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.

151. Many discussions are also being organized in the country on reproductive health, the monitoring of pregnant women and the involvement of men together with women throughout pregnancy and children's development. Health services create spaces to facilitate the presence of men with women in maternity wards at antenatal and postnatal consultations, childbirth and the monitoring of mothers and children.

152. Act No. 4-2010 of 14 June 2010 on child protection in the Republic of the Congo provides for sanctions against parents who fail to fulfil their responsibilities (arts. 93-127).

Article 6

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.

153. In the Congo, there is not yet a specific law to combat trafficking in women.

154. However, pursuant to several international and regional instruments to which the country has acceded, as well as national legislation, trafficking in persons is considered a crime. These include the following laws: Congolese legislation on trafficking in persons includes national, regional and international texts: (i) Act No. 18 of 31 May 2006 authorizing accession to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children and child prostitution; (ii) Palermo Protocol (ratified in March 2012); (iii) Act of 12 March 2012 authorizing the ratification of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; (iv) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2012); (v) the bill on trafficking in persons (validated at the workshop of 30 July 2013 in Brazzaville); (vi) Act 23-96 of 6 June 1996 laying down the conditions for the entry, stay and exit of foreigners in the Congo; (vii) Act No. 4-2010 of 14 June 2010 on child protection in the Republic of the Congo.

155. The Congo has acceded to the Multilateral Cooperation Agreement to Combat Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, in West and Central Africa, adopted in Abuja on 6 July 2006, between the Governments of the members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

156. The Congo also has a bilateral cooperation agreement with the Republic of Benin on the fight against trafficking in children, signed on 20 September 2011 in Pointe-Noire.

157. The authorities (national specialized border police) work with civil society (ALTO, SAMU Social) and international organizations (UNICEF, UNFPA, IOM). The actions taken include the establishment of a Joint Committee, the strengthening of mechanisms for the identification of perpetrators and accomplices of trafficking, the designation of focal points and the establishment of a network of State and non-State actors.

Part II

Article 7

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;

158. The right to vote is guaranteed by law to all women (Cf. Constitution of 6 November 2015, arts. 57 and 58, and Electoral Act 2014).

(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

159. Freedom of choice of training and work is recognized for both men and women. The Constitution of 6 November 2015 provides that "the State recognizes the right of all citizens to work and creates the conditions for the enjoyment of that right" (art. 30); "No one shall be required to perform forced labour, except in the case of a custodial sentence handed down by a legally established court" (art. 33). "Everyone has the right, in accordance with the law, to engage in the type of work of their choice (art. 48).

160. Specifically, Act No. 45/175 of 15 March 1975 establishing the Labour Code also enshrines the principle of equality in access to opportunities and chances to work for wages. This Act, still in force, also provides safeguards for the protection of women in managing their maternity.

161. However, the percentage of women employed in positions of responsibility in the institutions of the Republic remains low compared to the recommendations of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality of July 2004 issued in Addis Ababa, which requires at least 30 per cent participation of women in all decision-making bodies and elective posts.

162. At the level of decision-making bodies, women represent 21.7 per cent in the central public administration, 18.9 per cent in the judiciary, 13.8 per cent in the administration of local communities and 13.6 per cent in parliamentary commissions and administrations.[6]

163. In the Government, the number of women ministers increased from 5 to 8 from 2012 to 2016 (representing 21.05 per cent of women).

164. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, there is one woman with the rank and prerogatives of Ambassador (the chef de cabinet of the Minister). One out of five ambassador-level heads of departments is female (Under-Secretary-General for the Department of Multilateral Cooperation). One out of five goodwill ambassadors is a woman.

(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

165. Freedom of association is guaranteed by article 27 of the Constitution.

[6] Sosthène Milandou, Les femmes moins impliqués dans les sphères de prise de decision (Women who are less involved in decision-making spheres), ACI, Article published on 16/12/2015. Http://actualites.agencecongoinfo.net, Read on 22/10/2016.

166. Congolese women are involved in different types of organizations of public and political life: Organization of Congolese Women (OFC), Women of UPADS, Women Leaders of the Pool region, Women Leaders of Bouenza, Synergy of Plateaux Women, Mama Mouébara, Maman Antoinette Sassou Association of Spouses of Law Enforcement Officers, and others).

Article 8

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

167. Such measures include the appointment of four (4) women Ambassadors Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary (Cameroon, Namibia, Côte d' Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea).

168. Congolese women take part each year in the work of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. They are also part of the Congolese delegations during the universal periodic reviews (UPR) and at the United Nations General Assembly, although their number is still lower than that of men.

Article 9

1. States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality. They shall ensure in particular that neither marriage to an alien nor change of nationality by the husband during marriage shall automatically change the nationality of the wife, render her stateless or force upon her the nationality of the husband.

169. Congolese nationality is guaranteed by law (arts.10, 18 and 19 of the Constitution of 6 November 2015), the Nationality Code and Act No. 073/84 of 17 October 1984 establishing the Family Code (under revision).

2. States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.

170. The provisions for men and women also apply to children. This is provided for in the Constitution of 6 November 2015 (arts.10, 18 and 19); Act No. 073/84 of 17 October 1984 establishing the Family Code; and Act No. 10-2012 of 4 July 2012 instituting the regime for families and children in difficulty.

Part III

Article 10

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

(a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;

171. The right to education is guaranteed by law (cf. Constitution of 6 November 2015, arts. 17, 29). Act 25-95 of 17 November 1995 on the organization of the

educational system in the Republic of the Congo, currently in force, provides equal access to education and training for girls and boys.

172. For example, the gross enrolment rate at the national level increased from 106 per cent in 2005 to 123 per cent in 2013. For the same period, the gender parity index rose from 0. 93 to 0.97 (cf. UNICEF report "Situational analysis of children and women in the Congo 2013").

(b) Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;

173. Congolese law grants to girls and boys the same curricula, the same examinations, the same teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality.

(c) The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods;

174. To accelerate changes in attitudes at all levels of society, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education and Literacy (MEPSA), through the National Institute for Educational Research and Action (INRAP), is continuing the work begun in 2008 with UNFPA and UNESCO on the analysis of gender stereotypes in school textbooks and the training of officials responsible for the preparation of textbooks.

175. All schools of general education and technology are coeducational in the Congo.

(d) The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;

176. Scholarships granted by the public authorities (ministries) and foreign agencies (embassies, OIF, World Bank, UNFPA and UNDP) benefit girls and boys, on an equal footing. However, throughout the processes required for young people to be granted scholarships, discriminatory practices are often reported by participants: rackets, fraud, harassment or sexual abuse, intimidation, blackmail or deal-making. Thus, in the face of the costs of these parallel transactions and influence peddling, many families and girls do not follow the necessary administrative steps, and they miss out on scholarships. These practices, which are considered marginal, are obstacles in addition to the traditional challenges limiting the success of girls and children from poor families.

177. Increasingly, actions are being promoted by civil society organizations to provide scholarships for girls (FAWE, JED).

(e) The same opportunities for access to continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any existing gap in education between men and women.

178. School Act No. 25-95 of 17 November 1995 on the organization of the education system in the Republic of the Congo does not contain any discriminatory provisions on adult literacy and functional literacy.

179. In 2013, the literacy rate for men was 90 per cent and for women, 77 per cent, compared to 2005, when the literacy rate was 89 per cent for men and 73 per cent for women. Note that there has been a reduction in the gap between the literacy rates for men and for women from 16 per cent to 13 per cent, or 3 per cent.

(f) The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely; (g) The same possibilities exist for girls to participate actively in sports and physical education;

180. The enrolment efforts undertaken by the Government are significant, but at the same time, there are very high failure rates and high school dropout rates, especially among girls.

181. A significant number of students drop out of school without reaching an appropriate level of education; this phenomenon is more common among girls than among boys.

182. Overall, the school enrolment rate for girls is below that of boys, but the gap varies depending on the educational level:

(a) In primary school, the gender parity index, overall and at all levels, varies between 84 and 96 girls per 100 boys;

(b) At the secondary general education level, the index is 71 girls per 100 boys;

(c) At the secondary technical education level, the index is 35 girls per 100 boys;

(d) At the general education lycee, the index is 55 girls per 100 boys;

(e) At the technical education lycee, the index is 43 girls per 100 boys;

(f) At the university level, the gender parity index is 19 female students per 100 male students.

183. In respect of literacy, the proportion of literate men is higher than that of literate women (93 men compared to 85 women in urban areas and 85 men compared to 64 women in rural areas).

184. Efforts are being made by the Government and civil society to reduce female drop-out rates and to organize programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely: (i) establishment of a general directorate for literacy in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and Literacy (MEPSA); (ii) creation of a central directorate for child drop-outs in MEPSA; (iii) establishment of sports centres in all districts of Brazzaville; (iv) conduct of thematic studies on the education system and the particular situation of girls; (v) organization of awareness campaigns among young girls on the choice of study paths, staying in school and combating violence in schools (FAWE, Azur Development, associations of pupils and students, parents' associations, etc.)

185. The same possibilities exist for girls and for boys to participate actively in sports and physical education. This is true both for admission to training centres and for membership of teams. Women participate in almost all sports formerly reserved for men, and they also perform at a professional level. Only the traditionally female "ndzango" is not yet coeducational.

(h) Access to specific educational information to help ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.

186. This specific information is provided by the maternal and child health (MCH) services, university socio-medical centres and organizations such as the Association for Family Welfare (ACBEF) and community health associations located in neighbourhoods, youth centres (Ministry of Youth and ACBEF), social networks (Facebook, Twitter, TIC-TAC Ados site), and television and radio stations.

Article 11

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:

187. Access to employment is on a basis of equality in the Congo. The latest revision of the Labour Code included provisions on social security in order to address that concern.

188. The Constitution of 6 November 2015 includes a provision on equal access to employment.

(a) The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings;

189. The inalienable nature of employment is enshrined in the Constitution of 6 November 2015, which provides that "the State recognizes the right of all citizens to work and creates the conditions for the enjoyment of that right" (art. 30); "No one shall be required to perform forced labour, except in the case of a custodial sentence handed down by a legally established court" (art. 33).

(b) The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment;

190. The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment, are guaranteed by law. But for many reasons, women do not succeed as well as men in certain jobs.

(c) The right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to receive vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training and recurrent training;

(d) The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work;

191. Equal access is guaranteed by law; however, at promotion time, discriminatory actions may be taken.

192. To respond to points (b), (c) and (d), we note this extract from the NCB (p. 63): "As already mentioned, the number of women in the administration is lower than it should be". The same is true for women in decision-making positions in the private sector. Other inequalities affect the female gender at the level of wages, and there are glaring disparities between men and women in terms of access to capital, technical assistance and occupational training, markets and business. Women must be looked at as candidates for decent jobs in the various branches of activity and given access to credit, markets, training and technical assistance. In rural areas, they can participate at different stages of the agricultural cycle, fish processing, livestock, crafts and processing industries (fish smoking and drying, pottery and basketry in multifunctional platforms). In urban areas, they will carry out trade, catering, agricultural processing, sewing and hairdressing".

(e) The right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave;

(f) The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction.

193. The law on health insurance has been revised.

2. In order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:

(a) To prohibit, subject to the imposition of sanctions, dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy or of maternity leave and discrimination in dismissals on the basis of marital status;

194. Pregnant women are not subject to dismissal or injustices based on marital status or pregnancy. They are entitled to maternity leave under Act No. 45-75 of 15 March 1975, establishing the Labour Code of the Republic of the Congo, still in force, and the Constitution of 6 November 2015.

(b) To introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment, seniority or social allowances;

195. Pregnant women are entitled to maternity leave. Job security, seniority or social allowances are also guaranteed by law (Act No. 45-75 of 15 March 1975, establishing the Labour Code of the Republic of the Congo, still in force).

(c) To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through protection the establishment and development of a network of childcare facilities;

196. Because of the shortage of childcare facilities, most women rely on the services of family or household workers to free them to participate in public and political life.

(d) To provide special protection to women during pregnancy in types of work proved to be harmful to them.

197. Pregnant women whose work has proved to be harmful receive care from specialized medical and administrative services.

3. Protective legislation relating to matters covered in this article shall be reviewed periodically in the light of scientific and technological knowledge and shall be revised, repealed or extended as necessary.

198. Act No. 45-175 of 15 March 1975 establishing the Labour Code and the Social Security Code was revised in 2014.

Article 12

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.

199. With regard to public authorities, measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care, in order to ensure access to health care services on a basis of equality of men and women, are part of the National Health Plan. In an expanded partnership with NGOs, training programmes for health-care workers and awareness-raising activities for men and women are aimed at promoting changing attitudes and behaviours in order to reduce bottlenecks limiting women's access to medical services.

200. In this regard, certain steps have been taken to develop thematic programmes (combating early pregnancy and marriage, as well as obstetric fistula), to provide free caesarean sections and to distribute free insecticide-treated mosquito nets to pregnant women.

2. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1 of this article, States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the postnatal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.

201. Besides the general provisions to address public health needs, other measures are meant to enable specific actions for women of all ages. The separation of services for men is justified by the needs of convenience and common sense. With changing attitudes, access to services reserved for women is no longer fully denied to men (the latter being allowed to accompany their daughters or wives).

Article 13

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:

(a) The right to family benefits;

202. This is one of the items on the agenda of the commissions for the revision of legislation on gender discrimination (including the tax code). The problem often reported is that married women employees (staff) do not receive family allowances because such benefits are systematically paid to their spouses, enabling the latter to reduce their taxes (IRPP).

(b) The right to bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit;

203. This right is recognized under current legislation, but enjoyment of it remains limited for women because of a number of obstacles: scant knowledge and understanding of the operational mechanisms of the banking systems, low levels of education, psychological blocks, limited income, unwelcoming attitude on the part of some bank officials, inadequate banking hours for women working in the informal sector, etc. (except for MUCODEC in rare cases, where married couples have access to mortgages).

(c) The right to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life.

204. Historically, this right is recognized for both women and men. It is enshrined in many basic and sectoral laws (the Constitution and laws on tourism and sports, for example). The last Constitution, which governs the lives of the Congolese people, emphasizes that "everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including a limited number of working hours, periodic holidays and remuneration for public holidays under the conditions established by law" (art. 34). 301. "Every citizen has the right to protection of the moral and material interests resulting from their own scientific, literary or artistic production" (Constitution of 6 November 2015, art. 35).

Article 14

1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.

205. Among the measures taken by the State to take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which they play in the economic survival of their families are: (i) the adoption of development plans and

programmes with strategies aimed at addressing the specific needs of women: job facility for youth working in the public interest sector (DOJETIP) (2009); self-employment and micro-enterprise programme (PAME) (2009-2011); programme of graduate employment (PED) (2009-2011); programme of support for the development of rural employment (PADER) (2009-2011); career guidance programme (OPS); programme to support the employment of persons with disabilities and women (PAEPHF); programme to support the return of Congolese emigrants (PARIC); The joint United Nations programme for the consolidation of human security in the Pool region (2008-2014). It included a major component on the fight against GBV and comprehensive care for victims.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:

(a) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;

206. Women participate in the thematic meetings organized in the departments, and their contributions to diagnostic studies are taken into account in the development of the strategies.

(b) To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;

207. ACBEF has a policy to incorporate rural dwellers into neighbourhood awareness-raising programmes.

(c) To benefit directly from social security programmes;

208. Rural women who are beneficiaries of social security programmes are the wives of public officials.

(d) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;

209. Literacy centres located in the departments organize evening classes; these benefit girls and women who have more freedom in the evening.

(e) To organize self-help groups and cooperatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment;

210. IEC/CCC campaigns on revenue-generating activities and the promotion of mutual assistance cooperatives are carried out throughout the territory, through MPFIFD. These actions are aimed at encouraging women to form cooperatives to enhance their capacity and to obtain material and financial support from the Government and development partners. These campaigns managed to reach 12,000 women.

(f) To participate in all community activities;

211. According to their levels of information and the capacities of specialized services to mobilize them, rural women willingly participate in community activities and activities organized by all public and private services in the areas of life that affect them.

212. They increasingly form organized groups to work in rotation in the different fields belonging to each member. They are involved in agricultural production,

processing and packaging of many products (cassava, peanuts, maize, palm nuts, lianas, etc.), including in the local and national markets for these products.

(g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;

213. Spurred on by private bodies (mutual savings and credit associations, forums of start-up firms, women's funds savings and credit funds, etc.), women are able to obtain microcredits.

214. On the basis of religious associations (fraternités), "kilombo" and mutual associations ("miziki"), women form self-help groups and cooperatives in order to alleviate the burden of work, increase production and earn more income.

(h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

215. Despite the lack of up-to-date data on the situation of rural women, observations of the lives of many women from all departments reveal signs of progress in the social and economic status of these women.

216. Women's living conditions in all departments are rapidly and visibly improving. This has been one of the results of the undertaking of major road construction and electrification projects (accelerated municipal development), the installation of 4,000 boreholes in 4,000 villages across the country ("water for all" project), the installation of mobile network towers and the development of neighbourhood mechanisms for the transfer of money (Chardon Farel, FAM, etc.)

Part IV

Article 15

1. States Parties shall accord to women equality with men before the law.

2. States Parties shall accord to women, in civil matters, a legal capacity identical to that of men and the same opportunities to exercise that capacity. In particular, they shall give women equal rights to conclude contracts and to administer property and shall treat them equally in all stages of procedure in courts and tribunals.

3. States Parties agree that all contracts and all other private instruments of any kind with a legal effect which is directed at restricting the legal capacity of women shall be deemed null and void.

4. States Parties shall accord to men and women the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile.

217. The Congo has an arsenal of instruments aligned with international legal texts that ensure strict compliance with all the provisions of this recommendation. The main challenge resides in the weak capacity of individuals and specialized services to implement these laws.

Article 16

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

(a) The same right to enter into marriage;

(b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;

(c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;

(d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;

(e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights;

(f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;

(g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation;

(h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.

2. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

218. Points 1 and 2 above form part of the national agenda. These issues are the subject of discussions in the commissions for the revision of laws containing discriminatory provisions against women. The results of those revisions will determine the amended provisions.

Part V

Article 18

1. States Parties undertake to submit to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for consideration by the Committee, a report on the legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures which they have adopted to give effect to the provisions of the present Convention and on the progress made in this respect:

(a) Within one year after entry into force for the State concerned; and

(b) Thereafter at least every four years and further whenever the Committee so requests.

2. Reports may indicate factors and difficulties affecting the degree of fulfilment of obligations under the present Convention.

219. This report is submitted pursuant to the provisions of article 18, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

220. Under this provision, the Congo has submitted two important reports covering the periods 1982-2002 (initial report combining the second, third, fourth and fifth

periodic reports, submitted in January 2003) and 2003-2006 (sixth report — CEDAW/C/COG/6) submitted to the Committee in February 2012 during the fifty-first session of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, held in Geneva, Switzerland. During this presentation, the Congo had provided updated information and statistics disaggregated by sex on the situation of women in the Congo in all areas covered by the Convention in the period 2007-2012.

221. The current seventh periodic report covering the period 2012-2015 presents progress made by the country, but also the various challenges and opportunities.

Part VI

Article 24

> *States Parties undertake to adopt all necessary measures at the national level aimed at achieving the full realization of the rights recognized in the present Convention.*

222. All aspects discussed in this report reflect the existence of political will to properly implement the Convention. Also presented here are many examples of significant levels of national ownership.

Difficulties encountered in the implementation of the Convention

223. The difficulties encountered in the implementation of the Convention stem from barriers limiting women's access to basic social services, the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The factors underlying such obstacles are related, for example, to:

(a) Lack of knowledge among women about their rights;

(b) Illiteracy among women;

(c) Persistence of discrimination and violence against women and girls;

(d) Weak enforcement of laws for the promotion and protection of women's rights;

(e) Low level of ownership of the topic of gender at the national and sectoral levels, as well as inadequate alignment between the gender perspective and the institutional gender framework;

(f) Weak representation of women in decision-making posts;

(g) The limited and difficult release of resources and budgets allocated to the department responsible for the advancement of women and the integration of women in development;

(h) The shortage of gender-disaggregated data and reliable information on gender disparities and gender-based violence.

Looking forward

224. In general, the situation of Congolese women has fluctuated in a way that is sometimes difficult to explain.

225. Indeed, while several developed countries have succeeded in reducing some of the problems that particularly affect the lives of women, the Congo — which has achieved universal enrolment for girls and boys — has failed to mitigate problems related to complications of pregnancy and childbirth, for example. Experts continue to cite iiliteracy and lack of awareness among women about care options available in their local environments.

226. Moreover, the progress achieved in terms of school enrolment is still not enough to change the attitudes of men who perpetuate inequalities that discriminate against women on the pretext of superiority and/or traditions that must be respected.

227. In a national context subject to external cultural influences, it may be expected that some of the obstacles to the improvement of the cultural, legal and political status of women will be quickly overcome.

228. It is necessary, in the context of the transition to a new Republic, under a new Constitution conducive to gender parity, to ensure the maintenance and further improvement of the gains achieved by women. This will require: (i) expediting the adoption of the Gender Equality Act; (ii) activating existing mechanisms for raising women's awareness of current challenges with respect to their general condition and that of young people and encouraging them to mobilize and participate at all levels of public and political life.